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AN IRISH FOLK-TALE

BY TOM PEETE CROSS

THE following story was taken down in 1898 from the lips of an old man in County Mayo, Connacht, by Mr. Stephen Barrett of Dublin, to whose kindness I am indebted for the text and a large part of the translation.¹

The tale is of peculiar interest, as it furnishes an excellent example of the preservation in Modern Irish folk-lore of a feature found in one of our earliest Celtic documents. In the *Tochmarc Emire*,² which probably dates in its earliest form from the eighth century, Cuchulainn is carried on the back of a friendly Lion to the border of the other world in much the same way as the hero of our folk-tale is carried to the house of the shoemaker. It may be added that in the same document Cuchulainn rescues a princess in somewhat the same way as does the fisherman's son here.³

IASGAIRE A RABH MOR-SEISEAR
MAC AIGE

Ní rabh aon talamh aige. 'Sé an [t]-slighe beathadh a bhí aige an méid a thiocfadh leis a bhaint de'n fáirrghe. Bhí ceithre sgéarean-gach aige. Bhí sé féin agus a thriúr mac agus triúr eile fear d'en chomhairsin, bhí siad amuigh ag iasgaireacht. Ní rabh siad ag fagháil aon iasg. Thuit siad na gcodladh acht an sean-fear. Ní rabh sé i bhfad go bhfaca sé an mhaighdean mhara ag tiacht air ins a'bhfairrghe. Airs ise leis, "Ní'l tú ag tógáil éisg anocht." — "Ní'l," airs eisean. "Well," airs

THE FISHERMAN WHO HAD SEVEN
SONS

HE [the fisherman] had no land. His means of living was by fishing. He had four sets of nets. He himself, his three sons, and three other men of the neighbors, were out fishing. They were not catching any fish. They fell asleep, except the old man. It was not long until he saw a mermaid approaching him in the sea. She says to him, "You are not taking any fish to-night." — "I am not," says he. "Well," says she, "if you

¹ My thanks are also due to Dr. O. J. Bergin, of Dublin, for assistance in preparing the text for press.

² See *Archæological Review*, I (1888).

³ Professor Kuno Meyer dates the later version, in which the episode of the rescued princess occurs, at the eleventh century (*Revue Celtique*, XI, pp. 435 ff.). On this saga see, further, Miss Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, pp. 57 ff.; *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, III, p. 315; *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, III, pp. 229 ff; Haupt's *Zeitschrift*, XXXII, pp. 239 ff; Rhys, *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 448 ff; *Philol. Soc. Trans.* (1891-94), pp. 514, 556; A. C. L. Brown, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, XX (1905), pp. 688 ff.

ise, “á dtiubhrá dhamh-sa a’ rud a d’iarrfainn ort thógfa iasg agus dhíonfainn fear saidhbhir dhíot.” — “*Well,*” airs eisean, “níl fios a’m go dtéidhidh mé a bhaile nó céard tá tú iarraidh orm.” — “Tá,” airs ise, “do mhac nuair bheas sé bliadhain is fiche, — an mac,” airs ise, “nár rugadh go fóill. Seacht n-oidhche ó’n’ocht beidh mac ag do bhean, agus sin é an mac chaithfeas mise ’fagháil. Beannacht leat,” airs ise, “bí a’dul a bhaile.”

Nuair chuaidh an t-iasgaire a bhaile agus a pháirte d’innis sé dhá bhean a’rud adubhairt a’ mhaighdean mhara leis; “agus dubhairt sí liom,” airs eisean, “go ndíonfad sí fear saidhbhir dhíom.” — “Maith go leór,” airs an bhean, “bhíodh sé ’na mhargadh.”

An oidche lá ar na bhárach chuaidh sé féin agus a pháirte amach san áit chéadna. Chaith siad a gcuid eangach agus bhord.¹ Ní rabh aon iasg ionta. Thuit siad anonn ’s anall ’na gcodladh acht a’ sean-fear. Ní rabh sé i bhfad go bhfaca sé an mhaighdean mhara a’ tiacht air ins a’bhfairrge. “Is maith liom,” airs ise, “go bhfuil tú suas lé do gheallmhaint. Pill isteach,” airs ise, “’un a’chladaigh agus a’ méad feicfeas tú ann beidh sé ’na ór romhat. Tabhair leat do saith dhe; acht ní chreidfídh na fíir thú atá leat, agus ma (muna) gcomhnaidhe siad agat, abair leobhtha amhanc (amharc) faoi do láimh dheis, agus creidfídh siad féin ann sin thú.”

Tháinig siad isteach ’un a’ chla-

will give me what I should ask of you, you would catch fish, and I would make you a rich man.” — “*Well,*” says he, “I do not know until I go home, or [until I learn] what you are asking of me.” — “Your son,” says she, “who is yet unborn, when he shall be twenty-one years [old],” says she. “Seven nights from to-night your wife shall have a son, and that is the son which I must get. Good-by!” says she, “be going home.”

When the fisherman and his party went home, he told his wife the thing which the mermaid said to him; “and she said to me,” says he, “that she would make a rich man of me.” — “Good enough!” says the woman, “let it be a bargain.”

The following night he and his party went out to the same place. They cast their nets. There were no fish in them. They fell backwards and forwards asleep, except the old man. It was not long until he saw the mermaid coming to him in the sea. “I am glad,” says she, “that you are up to your promise. Return,” says she, “to the shore, and all you see there will be gold before you. Take with you enough of it; but the men who are with you will not believe you, and if they do not remain with you, tell them to look under your right arm, and then they will believe you.”

They came in to the shore.

¹ The text at this point is corrupt.

daigh. 'Ach uile seort 'a rabh rómpa bhí sé 'na ór bhuidhe. Aírs an sean-fear, "Ná himthigidh uaim go dtugaidh mé ualach mo dhroma liom." — "Céard a bhéaras tú leat," aís an mhuintir eile, "mur dtugaidh tú clocha agus uisge leat?" — "Amharcuigidh isteach faoi mo láimh dheis." D'amharc. "M'anam o'n diabhal," aís iad-san, "bhfuil an t-alamh 'na ór bhuidhe?" Amach léobhtha a' cruinniughadh agus díonadh cruipéan (cnaipéan). Nuair chruinnigh an sean-fear oiread agus mheas sé d'iomcharó'dh sé a bhaile d'imthigh sé agus a ualach leis. D'fan a'mhuintir eile 'na dhiaidh ag cruinniughadh agus ag díonamh cruipéan go dtainic trí tonn o'n bhfairge agus go dtug uabhtha na cruipéain. "Tá muid chomh dona agus bhímuid [sinn] riamh," aís fear aca. "Leanfá muid a' sean-diabhal go bhfeiceamuid bhfuil aon phighinn leis." Lean agus bhí sé ins a'teach rómpa. "A Seagháin, bhfuil aon phighinn leat?" aís iad-san. "Tá," aís Seaghán.

As sin suas thoisigh sé ag ceanacht talta agus stuic. Ní rabh aon fear ins an áit sin leat chomh saidhbhir leis. Bhí sé mar sin ar feadh i bhfad. Bhí sé féin agus a mhór-seisear mac lá ag dul 'un aifrin. "Badh bhreagh a' chlann mhac-se," aís an t-athair, "acht a beag aon rud amháin." — "Céard é sin, a athair?" aís an mac a b'oi. "Ní innseó'aidh mé dhuit é," aís an t-athair. "Caithfidh tú a innsint dam," aís an mac. "O chuir tú an cheist orm,

Everything which was before them was yellow gold. Says the old man, "Do not go [away] from me until I take the load of my back with me." — "What will you take with you," say the other people, "if you do not take stones and water with you?" — "Look in under my right arm." They looked. "My soul from the devil!" say they. "Is the land yellow gold?" They went off collecting and making little heaps. When the old man had collected as much as he thought he would carry home, he went, and his load with him. The others remained after him, collecting and making little heaps, until three waves came from the sea and took from them the little heaps. "We are now as badly off as ever," said one of the men. "We will follow the old devil until we see whether he has any penny [i.e., money] with him." They followed, and he was in the house before them. "John, have you any penny?" say they. "I have," says John.

From that [time] he commenced buying lands and stock. There was not a man in that place half as rich as he. He was so for a long time. He and his seven sons were one day going to mass. "You would be a fine lot of sons," says the father, "but for one thing only." — "What is that, father?" says the youngest son. "I will not tell you," says the father. "You must tell me," says the son. "Since you put the question to

caithfidh mé a fuasgailt. Dhíol mé thú leis an mhaighdean mhara tá bliadhain agus fiche ó soin. Tá an t-am anois i ngar a bheith thuas." — "*Well*," airs an mac, "tá sé i n-am agam-sa bheith ag imtheacht." — "*Well*," airs an t-athair, "tá buaidhreadh mór orm thú bheith ag imtheacht." Phill sé ar a'teach ar ais. "A mháthair," airs an mac, "éirigh, gléas biadh agus deoch dham agus ta'r'am costas le haghaidh an bhóthair fhada bhfuil mé le dul air." Réidhtigh agus thug dhó 'chuile sort a theastuigh uaidh.

Bhuail a' bóthar, bhí ag imtheacht agus ag síor-imtheacht gur casadh isteach i gleann coille é. Šuidh sé síos agus bhí sé tuirseach. Chonnaic sé leomhan na coille ag tarraingt air. "Chomh fada a ndeachaidh mé tá mé marbh ar deireadh." Tháinig an leomhan chomh fada leis ag amharc air. Thoisig sé dá lighe. "Tá tú tuirseach," airs sé, "šuidh suas ar mo dhruim agus bhéaraidh mé amach as a' gcoill thú." — "Is maith thú," airs eisean. Šuidh suas ar a dhruim, bhog leobhtha. Níor stad agus níor mhór-chomhnuigh go dtug sé chomh fada le teach gréasaidhe é a bhí díonta ar bhrúach locha. "Gabh isteach annsin," airs an leomhan, "agus gheabhthaigh tú loisdín go maidin ann."

Chuaigh sé isteach ins a'teach bheag. "Go mbeannuighidh Dia ann seo," airse eisean. "Go mbeannuighidh Dia agus Muire dhuit," airse fear a'tighe. "An bhfuighinn loisdín ann seo go maidin?"

me, I must answer it. I sold you to the mermaid twenty-one years ago. The time is now nearly up." — "*Well*," says the son, "it is time for me to be going." "*Well*," says the father, "I am greatly troubled that you are going." He returned to the house. "*Mother*," says the son, "arise, prepare food and drink for me, and give me expenses for the long road which there is for me to go." She prepared and gave him everything which he required.

He struck the road. He was proceeding and continuously going until he turned into a wooded glen. He sat down and was tired. He saw a lion of the wood coming toward him. "As long as I have gone, I am dead at last." The lion came up to him [and] looked at him. He commenced licking him. "You are tired," says he; "sit upon my back, and I will carry you out of the wood." — "You are good," says he. He sat up on his back, [and] they moved off. He did not stop or make any great delay until he brought him as far as the house of a shoemaker, which was built on the brink of a lake. "Go in yonder," says the Lion, "and you will get lodging until morning there."

He went into the little house. "God bless all here!" says he. "God and Mary bless you!" says the man of the house. "Would I get lodging here until morning?"

airs eisean. "Gheabhaidh agus fáilte," airse fear a'tighe, "agus is olc linn duit é." Suidh síos agus chaith suipéar i gcuideachta. "Anois," airs an gréasaidhe, "beidh cruinniughadh mór thall ann seo i mbárach. Tá ull-phéist na fairrge le bheith ann agus béidh inghean rígh ceangailte ann, agus caithfidh sí a fagháil le slogadh ma (muna) mbí aon duine le fagháil le n-a cosaint; ná (nó) an ngabhfaidh tusa? Má théidheann tú ann bhéaramuid linn a' bád." — "Badh mhaith liom a dhul ann," airs eisean, "acht níor mhaith liom dul ar fairrge, acht céibí sin dhe gabhfaidh mé ann; acht níor mhór dhúinn arm cosanta bheith linn." — "Tá sean-chlaidheamh beag meirgeach ann sin amuigh a bhíonns ag gearradh turnapáí agus gabáisdé," airse an gréasaidhe. "Díonfaidh sé sáthach maith," airs an strainséaraidhe, "bhéaraidh mise liom é."

Nuair a chuaidh siad anonn ann sin ins a' mbád agus chonnaic siad a' cruinniughadh mór a bhí rompa, bhí inghean rígh an oiléana ceangailte ar chathaoir óir agus ull-phéist na fairrge le tiacht dá hithe ar uair a dó-dhéag an lá sin. Bhí righte, prionnsaidhe agus iarlaidhe cruinnighthe ann le dul ag troid leis an ull-phéist. Ar uair a' dó-dhéag chonnaic siad an fairrge a' crothadh agus a' dul le mire agus an ull-phéist a tiacht ag cur fairrge go bárra' na gcnoc ar gach taobh dhi go dtáinic sí isteach i n-áit a rabh an bhainríoghan óg in a suidhe. Ní rabh éinne i n-ann a dhul roimpi acht a' fear

says he. "You will, and welcome," says the man of the house, "and we consider the accommodation poor for you." They sat down and ate supper in company. "Now," says the shoemaker, "there will be a great meeting over yonder to-morrow. The great sea-monster is to be there, and the King's daughter will be tied there, and it must get her to swallow unless there shall be somebody to defend her; or would you go? If you do go there, we shall take the boat with us." — "I should like to go," says he, "but I should not like to go on the sea; but however that may be, I will go. But we should have arms of defence with us." — "There is a little old rusty sword outside there, which is for cutting turnips and cabbage," says the shoemaker. "It will do well enough," says the stranger. "I will take it with me."

When they went over there in the boat and saw the great crowd which was before them, the King's daughter of the island was tied in a golden chair, and [the] sea-monster coming to eat her at the hour of twelve that day. There were kings, princes, and earls collected there to go to fight with the monster. At the hour of twelve they saw the sea moving and going mad, and the monster coming, putting the sea to the tops of the hills on each side of it, till it came to the place in which the young princess was sitting. There was no one there to go be-

seo. D'éirigh sé do léim agus chuaidh i mullach na hull-phéiste le n-a chlaidhimhín meirgeach. Bhí sé a' dul di gur mharbh sé í. "Ní phósfaidh mise," fáirs an bhainríoghan óg, "aon fear acht a' fear sin." Pósadh le chéile an bheirt.

Mí i n-éis an ama sin bhí sé 'na seasamh ar bruach fairrge agus chonnaic sé an mhaighdean mhara a' tiacht air ins a' bhfairrge. Airs ise leis, "Bliadhain agus fiche ins a' lá indiu a cheannuigh mé thú ó d'athair agus ó do mháthair. Ní rabh me le do mharbhadh ná le do bhaitheadh agus is me thug a' bealach seo thú le bheith in do chliamhain ag rígh an oiléana. Díon go maith dhuit féin feasta," airs ise. "Tá tú ar bhealach maith anois. Ní féicfidh tú mise níos mó," airs an mhaighdean mhara.

fore it but this man. He arose with a leap and went on the back of the monster with his little rusty sword. He went for it until he killed it. "I will not marry anyone," says the young princess, "but that man." The two were married.

A month from that time he was standing on the shore of the sea, and he saw the mermaid approaching him in the sea. Says she to him, "Twenty-one years ago to-day I bought you from your father and mother. It was not to kill you or drown you, and it is I who took you this way to be son-in-law to the King of the island. May you prosper henceforth," says she. "You are in a good way now. You will not see me again," says the mermaid.